

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

16/7/2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts

My name is James Batchelor and I am a freelance choreographer and dancer based in Canberra, aged 23. I am writing to express my deep concern for the future of the Australian arts community given the recent changes to federal arts funding in the 2014 and 2015 budgets. I particularly object to the removal of substantial funds from the Australia Council's annual budget for the establishment of the NPEA, which will disproportionately skew funding opportunities away from the small to medium arts sector and independent artists.

The Australian arts scene is widely recognised as one of the most innovative and diverse communities in the world, a community that is rapidly growing. At the same time, government investment in our arts industry is in rapid decline, with very few other means to substitute the leverage it creates in the sector. Given this fact, the allocation of funding to artists in an efficient and fair manner is more important now than ever before. The Australia Council is the best model we have to do this effectively.

The decision to remove funds from the Australia Council to establish the NPEA, while at the same time quarantining major companies, implicitly means that the small to medium arts sector will take the fall. This decision seems to have been made on the assumption that major performing arts companies have the largest role and impact within the broader Australian community. This assumption is incorrect. Small to medium organisations and independent artists represent the bulk of Australian output in the arts and have the largest capacity to connect with the broader community. This disparity is exacerbated by the fact that the NPEA appears to have been designed so that only majors can access it. These decisions will effectively dismantle the lifeblood of the industry.

What this means for the future of Australian arts (to name a few):

- Artists will have significantly reduced opportunities to produce work independently of major arts organisations, limiting art form development, experimentation and innovation.
- Small to medium organisations will have a significantly reduced capacity to nurture artists and facilitate contexts for community engagement.
- The output of major companies will become streamlined and the arts will inadequately represent the cultural diversity of Australia.
- Young and emerging artists will have no means to establish their practices, which in the long term will create a shortage in skills and a lack of candidates to step into leadership roles.

As a young and emerging artist myself, this final point is of particular concern. I have been extremely lucky in my early career to be supported through Australia Council programs such as Artstart, JUMP Mentorships and the Creative Australia initiatives

targeted at emerging artists (all of which have been cut as a result of the 2014 and 2015 budgets). The works I have made with this support have represented Australia in Italy, France, United Kingdom, China and Thailand. One of my recent projects ISLAND was a recipient of a Green Room Award (Concept and Realisation), an ACT Arts Award (Dance) and has recently been nominated on the shortlist for an Australian Dance Award (Outstanding Achievement Independent Dance). In recognition of my achievements, I have also been awarded the Canberra Young Citizen of the Year for Arts. I have worked extremely hard to achieve at this level and I hope that one day my practice as an independent artist might be able to reach even wider audiences within Australia and internationally. I am resilient and strong and I will continue to achieve my goals with or without the support of the government. But what about those who were not as lucky as me? What about the artists and communities that do not have a voice? I am deeply concerned that the next generation of artists will not have the chance to feel the same level of confidence and strength in their practices. What will the Australian arts industry look like in which there is no strength and confidence?

I urge the government to reconsider its changes to the arts funding in the 2014 and 2015 budgets and reverse its decision to direct funds away from the Australia Council in establishing the NPEA. This is a matter that deserves thorough consultation and discussion with the community that it is affecting so greatly.

Yours sincerely,

James Batchelor